

A Rebuttal to the Islamic Dilemma

When David Wood visited the Speaker's Corner in London, his central argument against Islam that he regurgitated was that the Quran affirms the inspiration, preservation and authority of the Bible despite contradicting its teachings and doctrines. If the bible is true, what follows is that the Quran confirms a book yet contradicts its doctrines. But if the bible is false, the Quran is guilty of confirming unreliable and false scripture. However, Wood is not alone since the same argument has been propounded by other apologists like Nabeel Qureshi, Sam Shamoun and Anthony Rogers. After the following critical examination, it should be clear that the argument is based on erroneous reasoning and weak foundations.

What Muslims believe about the Gospels and the Torah

The traditional Muslim account about the Gospel, also called Injeel, and Torah is that God either directly dictated or ordered angels to recite them unto Jesus and Moses, respectively. There was no physical book that descended from the heaven and given to the messenger. Once the oral revelation has been given to the respective prophet, it would be recited to the followers and community of believers and would continue in the oral tradition until someone would record down what the community is circulating verbally. In this sense, the Injeel and Torah are primarily oral revelation before they were written down in books later by Jews and Christians. Muslim scholarship holds that the Injeel and Torah could have been corrupted either through the distortion and embellished of the oral tradition before written documents were set down or through what Jeremiah 8:8 says "the lying pen of the scribes that has handled it falsely" or in other words, scribal changes to the Biblical text that have accumulated over the centuries.

Methodological errors

The first thing to note is the more obvious one that I think all parties will agree to. This argument is not evidence for Christianity or Judaism since neither Judaism nor Christianity holds the Quran to be the word of God and as a result the claims of the Quran whether they confirm or refute the inspiration and preservation of the Bible are, according to Christianity, unreliable and come from a false source and thereby can not be used as evidence. The argument at best would be an argument against Islam and the authenticity of its scripture.

Secondly, When the Quran mentions the Injeel and the Taurat given to the prophets, it is clearly referring to the oral revelation dictated to Jesus and Moses, not the Old Testament or the New Testament which were written long after their time on Earth. This point requires the most comprehension since everytime the Quran is speaking of the Injeel and Taurat, it is referring to the original **oral** revelation given to prophets not the **written** documents in the Old and New Testament. The Injeel is not the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. The Taurat is not the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old testament.

Another important note is that the whenever the Quranic verse appears to be condoning the bible, it is only with regards to the authentic and uncorrupted oral tradition that was written down in the Bible as we know it today. In that sense, every "confirmation" of the

Bible found in the Quran is only of the authentic verses that were part of the original oral revelation but did make it into the New Testament Gospels and the Pentateuch. One potential example of this is in John 17:3 where the verse says "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent". The verse affirms the exclusive divinity of the God of Jesus and that he alone is God and that Jesus is only a messenger. This verse is one potential example of a passage that was revealed to Jesus, made its way into the Bible as we have it today and is thereby authenticated by the Quran.

The final methodological error that Christian apologists make is that even granting that the Quran is speaking of a written book called the Gospel, why is the Quran specifically talking about the New Testament Gospels rather than some other Gospel? What prevents the Quran from directing its confirmation towards the Gospel of Barnabas where Jesus openly declares himself to be only a Prophet and denies that he is God repeatedly? There is no reason to restrict the reference to a Gospel in the Quran only to the 4 in the current New Testament. For all we know, even if the Quran was talking about a written book, it could be a "Gospel" that is now lost.

The Quran on the Inspiration of the Bible

There are general verses in the Quran which establish that God gave revelations like the Injeel and the Taurat unto Prophets. This is right in-line with what Islam teaches about prophets receiving oral revelation from God. Some of those general verses are Surah 3 verse 3, Surah 5 verse 46, Surah 19 verse 30 and so on. These verses of course are totally silent on whether the message of the revelation got corrupted later in the oral tradition or in written text and so do not help the argument of the Islamic dilemma. Other verses like surah 6 verse 114, Surah 5 verse 35, Surah 3 verse 84 say the same thing as the ones cited above confirming the providence of previous oral revelation imparted to prophets. Yet similarly, is silent on whether they were corrupted at a later time. Take Surah 3 verse 3, for example,

>He has sent down upon you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming what was before it. And He revealed the Taurat and the Injeel.

All the above verse is saying is that previous prophets received revelations by the names of the Taurat and Injeel. It says nothing on whether these revelations were corrupted later or on whether the New Testament and Old Testament in our current Bible are authoritative.

The Quran on the Preservation of the Bible

Another approach that proponents of this argument use is to abandon appealing to the aforementioned verses and to use another set of verses to show that the Quran affirms that the previous revelation cannot be corrupted. Let's have a look.

The verses used to advance this argument are Surah 6 verse 115 , Surah 18 verse 27 , Surah 6 verse 34, Surah 10 verse 64 as well as many others.

Surah 6:115

>And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and in justice. None can alter His words, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing.

Surah 18:27

>And recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord. There is no changer of His words, and never will you find in other than Him a refuge.

Surah 6:34

>And certainly were messengers denied before you, but they were patient over [the effects of] denial, and they were harmed until Our victory came to them. And none can alter the words of Allah . And there has certainly come to you some information about the [previous] messengers.

Surah 10:64

>For them are good tidings in the worldly life and in the Hereafter. No change is there in the words of Allah . That is what is the great attainment.

What should be clear from the above is that the Quran repeatedly says that nobody can alter the words of Allah. However, does that mean that the Bible as we have it could not have been corrupted from the original Injeel and Taurat?

Notice what the Quran is saying. It is saying that none can change Allah's words. Recall from above that Allah's words are the oral revelations of the Injeel and Taurat given to their respective prophets. When the scribes are changing the text of the bible by editing, adding or omitting verses or passages, they are changing the manuscripts, they are NOT forcing God to go back in time and change the revelation he gave. What the scribes alter and change has no bearing on the actual oral revelation that was given. Therefore, these verses are addressing a different topic than what Christian apologists are trying to use to advance their project. While the verses are used to clarify that Allah does not change the oral revelation given to a prophet, proponents of this argument misinterpret it to be taken as clear evidence on the preservation of the Old and New Testament.

Moreover, another option is completely left wide open. Tafseer Ibn Kathir, the foremost book in Islamic Theology on Quranic Exegesis, explains exactly what the phrase "None can alter his words" means. Here is the tafseer on the meaning of the phrase.

>(None can change His Words.) meaning, **none can avert Allah's judgment** whether in this life or the Hereafter

So clearly the word “ayat” translated as words in the aforementioned verses could also mean judgement which means that the above verses support the doctrine of the immutability of God’s judgement and have nothing to say on the preservation of previous scriptures.

The Quran on the Authority of the Bible

The final component of this argument which gets the most attention is to argue that the Quran confirms the authority and validity of the Bible at the time of the revelation of the Quran. Many verses have been used to support this claim. Let’s have a look.

Surah 5 verse 43

>But how is it that they come to you for judgement while they have the Torah, in which is the judgement of Allah ? Then they turn away, [even] after that; but those are not [in fact] believers.

The context behind this verse can be seen through the following hadith.

>>The Jews came to Allah's Apostle and told him that a man and a woman from amongst them had committed illegal sexual intercourse. Allah's Apostle said to them, "What do you find in the Torah (old Testament) about the legal punishment of Ar-Rajm (stoning)?" They replied, (But) we announce their crime and lash them." Abdullah bin Salam said, "You are telling a lie; Torah contains the order of Rajm." They brought and opened the Torah and one of them solaced his hand on the Verse of Rajm and read the verses preceding and following it. Abdullah bin Salam said to him, "Lift your hand." When he lifted his hand, the Verse of Rajm was written there. They said, "Muhammad has told the truth; the Torah has the Verse of Rajm. The Prophet then gave the order that both of them should be stoned to death. ('Abdullah bin 'Umar said, "I saw the man leaning over the woman to shelter her from the stones.

- Sahih Bukhari 4:56:829

In other words, the Quran was only confirming that the verse of stoning in the Torah is authentic and the “judgement” of Allah. It was not confirming the whole Torah at the time of the Quran’s revelation.

The same response can be seen here :

http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=776

Surah 5 verse 47

>And let the People of the Gospel judge by what Allah has revealed therein. And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed - then it is those who are the defiantly disobedient.

The verse when read once prima facie, seems to endorse the view that the Quran supports the authority of the Bible. However, read it again slowly. Notice how the verse explicitly says

“let the People of the Gospel judge **by what Allah has revealed therein**”. So clearly the verse is calling Christians to judge by what was actually revealed by Allah to Jesus and managed to make it through the oral tradition and manuscript tradition without being corrupted. Nowhere in the verse is it calling Christians to judge by the entirety of the New Testament but only by whatever passages therein that were revealed to the prophet.

Moreover, the following verse clearly states that the Quran is a criterion over the Bible not the other way around. The implications of this is that if any part of the Bible disagrees with the Quran, then we should disregard that passage of the Bible as corrupted or entirely fabricated.

Surah 5 verse 68

>Say, "O People of the Scripture, you are [standing] on nothing until you uphold [the law of] the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been revealed to you from your Lord." And that which has been revealed to you from your Lord will surely increase many of them in transgression and disbelief. So do not grieve over the disbelieving people.

The reason that apologists of this argument fall into error is by misinterpreting the verse. Apologists interpret this verse to confirm the authority of the Old and New Testament at the time of the revelation of the Quran. But is that what the verse says? No. All the verse is saying that the Jews and Christians should uphold the original revelations of the Taurat and the Injeel as well as “whatever else has been revealed from your Lord”. The verse is speaking about **the revelation** given to the respective Prophet not the text we have in our hands or at the time of the revelation of the Quran. Moreover, it should be noted that “whatever else has been revealed from your Lord” would of course include the Quran, so this verse also serves as a command to Christians and the Jews to follow the Quran.

Surah 10 verse 94

>So if you are in doubt, [O Muhammad], about that which We have revealed to you, then ask those who have been reading the Scripture before you. The truth has certainly come to you from your Lord, so never be among the doubters.

It should be immediately clear that the verse does not speak of the Injeel and the Taurat. Yet, proponents of this argument claim that since the verse asks the Prophet to consult with the Jews and Christians about his revelation then that must mean that their scriptures at the time are well-preserved and authoritative. This of course is a fallacy called a non-sequitur argument where the conclusion does not follow from the argument itself. It does not follow that the Prophet was asked to consult with the People of the book, that therefore the Bible is not corrupted. One of the classical of Quranic exegesis is Tafseer al-Jalalayn also gives us an account of this verse:

>>So if you O Muhammad (s) are in doubt concerning what We have revealed to you of stories — hypothetically speaking — then question those who read the

Scripture the Torah before you for it is confirmed therein with them and they can inform you of its truth. The Prophet s said 'I have no doubt nor will I question'. Verily the Truth from your Lord has come to you; so do not be of the waverers of those who have doubts about it.

As should be clear from the above exegesis, this specific verse was a command to the Prophet, in a hypothetical situation where he doubts his revelation, to confer with the Jews of his day about the validity of the stories of history revealed in the Quran.

In addition, the verse itself makes no reference to the Prophet Mohammad rather the phrase [O Muhammad] was added in later by translators who extrapolated data from tafseers they read. As such the verse is not conclusive since the subject in question could very well be Jesus, or Moses rather than the Prophet Muhammad.

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The following subargument employs the following three verses to argue that the Quran confirms the Torah and Injeel at the time of the revelation to Prophet Muhammad and of course, the Quran can not confirm a corrupted book.

Surah 2 verse 89

>And when there came to them a Book from Allah **confirming that which was with them** - although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved - but [then] when there came to them that which they recognized, they disbelieved in it; so the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers.

Surah 4 verse 47

>O you who were given the Scripture, believe in what We have sent down [to Muhammad], **confirming that which is with you**, before We obliterate faces and turn them toward their backs or curse them as We cursed the sabbath-breakers. And ever is the decree of Allah accomplished.

Surah 2 verse 91

>And when it is said to them, "Believe in what Allah has revealed," they say, "We believe [only] in what was revealed to us." And they disbelieve in what came after it, **while it is the truth confirming that which is with them**. Say, "Then why did you kill the prophets of Allah before, if you are [indeed] believers?"

Now, in what way does the Qu'ran confirm the scriptures of the Jews and Christians?

Ibn Kathir tell us again.

Here is Ibn Kathir's exegesis on Surah 2 verse 89

>>And when there came to them (the Jews), a Book (this Qur'an) from Allah confirming what is with them (the Tawrah) and the Injil (Gospel))." Abu Al-'Aliyah said, "The Jews used to ask Allah to send Muhammad so that they would gain victory over the Arab disbelievers. They used to say, **'O Allah! Send the Prophet that we read about - in the Tawrah - so that we can torment and kill the disbelievers alongside him.'** When Allah sent Muhammad and they saw that he was not one of them, they rejected him and envied the Arabs, even though they knew that he was the Messenger of Allah.

So the above verse could be interpreted to mean the Quran as a confirmation of either the monotheism preached in the Taurat or to mean that Islam confirms the prophecies in the Taurat about the coming of Prophet Muhammad.

Another interpretation of these verses is that the Quran itself is a "tasdeeq" (confirmation) of those scriptures in that without the Quran there would be no "tasdeeq" and the Bible would be false.

Conclusion

As is clear from the comprehensive rebuttal provided above, the argument that the message of Islam self-destructs because the Quran confirms scriptures it contradicts, is unsubstantiated and founded on several methodological errors. The erroneous reasoning that proliferates the "Islamic Dilemma" as it was coined by David wood also extends to the minor arguments that he proposes to support his project. We pray that our Christian and Jewish friends would stop engaging with this red herring to mask the corruption of the Bible from the public.